

## P R E F A C E \*

THE manuscript that I began in May, 1945, was headed *Cosmos and History*. It was only later that I changed its title to *Archetypes and Repetition*. But finally, at the suggestion of the French publisher, I made *Archetypes and Repetition* the subtitle, and the book was published in 1949 as *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (*Le Mythe de l'éternel retour*). This has sometimes given rise to misunderstandings. For one thing, the archaic ideology of ritual repetition, which was the central subject of my study, does not always imply the "myth of the eternal return." And then too, such a title could lead the reader to suppose that the book was principally concerned with the celebrated Greek myth or with its modern reinterpretation by Nietzsche, which is by no means the case.

The essential theme of my investigation bears on the image of himself formed by the man of the archaic societies and on the place that he assumes in the Cosmos. The chief difference between the man of the archaic and traditional societies and the man of the modern societies with their strong imprint of Judaeo-Christianity lies in the fact that the former feels himself indissolubly connected with the Cosmos and the cosmic rhythms, whereas the latter insists that he is connected only

\* When the present work was published in a Harper Torchbooks paperback edition in 1959, the author consented to change its title to *Cosmos and History* and prepared a special preface. The Princeton/Bollingen paperback edition, with Professor Eliade's permission, restored the original English title. The 1959 preface is given here, with the omission of its opening and closing phrases. The text of the book is that of the corrected second printing of 1965, including the complete bibliography.—EDITOR.

## PREFACE

with History. Of course, for the man of the archaic societies, the Cosmos too has a "history," if only because it is the creation of the gods and is held to have been organized by supernatural beings or mythical heroes. But this "history" of the Cosmos and of human society is a "sacred history," preserved and transmitted through myths. More than that, it is a "history" that can be repeated indefinitely, in the sense that the myths serve as models for ceremonies that periodically reactualize the tremendous events that occurred at the beginning of time. The myths preserve and transmit the paradigms, the exemplary models, for all the responsible activities in which men engage. By virtue of these paradigmatic models revealed to men in mythical times, the Cosmos and society are periodically regenerated. Later on in this book I discuss the effects that this faithful reproduction of paradigms and this ritual repetition of mythical events will have on the religious ideology of the archaic peoples. It is not difficult to understand why such an ideology makes it impossible that what we today call a "historical consciousness" should develop.

In the course of the book I have used the terms "exemplary models," "paradigms," and "archetypes" in order to emphasize a particular fact—namely, that for the man of the traditional and archaic societies, the models for his institutions and the norms for his various categories of behavior are believed to have been "revealed" at the beginning of time, that, consequently, they are regarded as having a superhuman and "transcendental" origin. In using the term "archetype," I neglected to specify that I was not referring to the archetypes described by Professor C. G. Jung. This was a regrettable error. For to use, in an entirely different meaning, a term that plays a role of primary importance in Jung's psychology could lead to confusion. I need scarcely say that, for Professor Jung,

## PREFACE

the archetypes are structures of the collective unconscious. But in my book I nowhere touch upon the problems of depth psychology nor do I use the concept of the collective unconscious. As I have said, I use the term "archetype," just as Eugenio d'Ors does, as a synonym for "exemplary model" or "paradigm," that is, in the last analysis, in the Augustinian sense. But in our day the word has been rehabilitated by Professor Jung, who has given it a new meaning; and it is certainly desirable that the term "archetype" should no longer be used in its pre-Jungian sense unless the fact is distinctly stated.

An author is seldom satisfied with his work ten years after finishing it. There is no doubt that, if I were writing this little book now, it would be very different. Yet such as it is, with all its faults of commission and omission, I still consider it the most significant of my books; and when I am asked in what order they should be read, I always recommend beginning with the present work.

MIRCEA ELIADE

*University of Chicago*  
*November, 1958*

